

Chapter - 6

Development projects taken by the State and BTC Government towards the empowerment of women:

National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001 admits that there still exist, a wide gap between the enunciated goals and situational reality of status of women in India. The need for strengthening the legal system at elimination of all forms of discrimination has been emphasized time and again. The First Five Years plan viewed the issue of women and their development from the welfare points of view. The latter Plans took this issue with a strategy for their empowerment. But instead of broad frame work and perspectives this strategies are not translated into social, political, educational and cultural empowerment of women.¹

Status of women is the indicator to the progress of a society as well as of the country. Women could play an important role in the development of the society and the country. In that case education is the major force which can bring far reaching change to the society, as well as to the status of women. At the same time, in a representative democracy, participation and representation of women in the decision making bodies is also vital for the empowerment of women. Education is considered as an important factor which could shape not only the personality of an individual but also could develop the social set up of the community as a whole. The social set up of the community could be developed by imparting same type of education both for males and females. Women should be given free hand to impart all sorts of education for the fullest development of their personality.² Since women also

constitute 50% of the total population of the society, therefore, they are also equally responsible for bringing social change.

Empowerment of women appears to be much publicized concept of 21st century through political participation. The politicians, the policy makers, the national leaders, the media and even international community talk about political empowerment of women. Yet women are nowhere near to bring full and equal opportunities in policy choices that affect their lives. The lack of opportunities for participation in the decision making bodies has far reaching consequences of Bodo women. It deprives women from their important rights and responsibilities as citizen, their viewpoints and representatives tend to be remained unheard or under represented.

In the societies women had been considered naturally unsuited to political activity and had been formally or informally excluded from it. The legacy of this old belief, reinforced by unequal domestic division of labour not only handicapped women in the pursuit of political office but also prevents them from being active in political participation of any type of nature. Bodo women need protection of their rights and interests. Male alone should not make laws pertaining to the rights of women. According to J.S. Mills, women require more political right as they are more dependent on law for the protection of their rights and interests.³ Their active participation in law making is of vital importance as there are good reasons to be believed that issues effecting women are not taken seriously by men.

To give women their proper role in the society and to vest them with human rights and equality with men is nothing short of a major social revolution. Its origin can be traced in the minds of liberal thinkers' of the pre-independence era such as

Raja Ram Mahan Roy, M.K. Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru etc. who gradually started the work of emancipation of women. But the urge still remains largely unfulfilled as she is searching for her place in the society. By simply observing colourful programme of "International Women's Days" every year on 8th March can not help in solving the problems of women folks in our country. It is only through her awareness and assertion of rights and privileges in various domains of social activity that can alone help her to attain the status of equality.

The seed for development and social change should be implemented at the grassroot level i.e. in the curriculum in schools and colleges. Every school, college, and University ought to become an entry point of right to education. The right to education must be offered to all without discrimination as this gives everyone the benefit of education and an awareness of other rights to which they are entitled. Modern studies and researches have shown that women, educated, healthy and enjoying elementary human rights, are at the basis of the progress and prosperity of a society. Women's education has, for example, a beneficially multiplier effect on social development and eventually on economic development. Kerala is an example of this development. Infantile mortality, population growth and average expectation of life in Kerala is equal to that of many developed countries.

National development will be more effective when citizens irrespective of being a man or woman have an active share in all its activities. Women are considered as most of the powerful resources for the development of any country. Women in developing countries face a double deprivation; overall human development achievement is low in these countries and women achievement is lower than that of men's. Despite the Constitution of India guarantees 'equality of

status' to women, they do not enjoy full equality in the society. The majority population of women are illiterate, unpaid, deprived and disadvantaged.

Empowerment is the process of generating and building capabilities to exercise control over one's own life. Empowerment is the means as well as goals of self development. Women's empowerment is a model of gender analysis that traces women's increasing equality by empowerment through five phases, viz. welfare, access, conscientation, participation and control. It is a process whereby women can establish their control over various assets and which helps them to develop their confidence. Women constitute almost 50% of human resources. Until and unless women resources are not properly exploited society would continue to be deprived of its full development. Besides the existence of deep-rooted patriarchal social structure and traditional mindset of people, due to low self-esteem, lack of skill, lack of conceptual understanding etc., women fail to realise their potentiality. In this regard, education is the key tool to abolish evil practices from the society and to literate women from their ignorance and narrowness of thinking. Education helps women not only externally but also internally. It gives women confidence, liberty, identity, security etc.⁴

Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building to greater participation, to greater decision making power and control and to transformative action. Today women empowerment is considered as one of the prime issues for building nation all over the world. Empowering of women pre-supposes a drastic, dynamic and democratic change in the perception of and expectation from women in our society. Women are the assets who can reshape and reconstruct the society in all aspects - socially, economically, politically, and culturally etc. So women should be empowered with greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy

in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives or to have greater control over their circumstances that influence their lives and free them from shackles imposed on them by customs beliefs and practices. Empowering women is the need of the hour and has been deeply realized by all sections of people in today's world. As we are aware of the fact that women constitute half of the total population of the country, the responsibility of making them more powerful and stronger also lies in the hands of conscious citizens of the country. The goal of attaining and strengthening Indian women empowerment must be accomplished through a well planned, well defined and well organised efforts extended by every citizen of India. Empowerment is the expansion in peoples ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability previously denied to them. Women empowerment is closely associated with the nation building, since women is responsible for enriching healthy life and living to make it more meaningful and enjoyable; therefore, empowering them is very essential rather urgent need of the day.⁵

The term empowerment is widely used in the context of development particularly for women. It is way of overcoming barriers in one's life through which the individual increases her ability to shape her life and environment. It also means to strengthen women's positive outlook, confidence and values of an individual through which they can participate in all kinds of activities and able to co-operate with men folks in the field of social, economic and political sphere, public administration, science and technology etc. The fact that women need to be empowered has been stressed times and again by socially and educationally enlightened groups of people by realizing the fact that women can play a very

significant role in the development of human resources and in shaping the character of the nation's future generation.

Thus, empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process which should enable women to realise their full identity and power in all spheres of life. It would consist of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives and free them from shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice. Education is the only means of empowering women to protect their rights, to fight against exploitation and discrimination, and impart skills and self confidence. Besides the women movement and a wide spread network of non-governmental organisations, which have strong grassroots presence and deep insight into women's concerns, can also contribute in inspiring initiative for the empowerment of women. Gender equality and empowerment to women is recognised globally as an element to achieve progress in all areas. The Charter of the United Nations signed in 1945, the first international agreement that proclaimed gender equality, was fundamental right. The principle of equality is also written in Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Right, Duties and Directives Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures for the upliftment of women folks. Though the Constitution of India guarantees equality to status to women, they do not enjoy full equality in the society due to illiteracy. To highlight the importance of women education, Jawaharlal Nehru said, "Education of a boy is education of one person but education of a girl is education to the whole family." Until and unless women are educated, they can not help in modernisation and development of the society.⁶ Thus, education is indispensable; the future prospects of women depend also on

economic, social and legal changes that will promote the access of women to education.

Socially conscious and literate society has a vital role to play in democracy. Education helps the capacity to learn, read and use mathematics, to acquire information and to think critically about information. Women are a vital part of Indian economy, constituting one third of the national labour force and a major contributor to the survival of the family. Women are builders of the nation right from the early days in their homes and the children received their first education at their hand. According to Gandhi, 'the home is the first university and parents – especially mothers are the first teacher'. Women as mothers take care of their family, advice and guide their children and mould the character and personality of men. They are not only teachers of children, performing all the domestic tasks, but they also take part in various economic activities. In public life women are considered more competent and pragmatic than men. The empowered women may become agents of their own development and may be tool for economic change. Jawaharlal Nehru rightly says, "To awaken the people, it is women, who must be awakened, once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves".⁷

Women Developmental Programmes undertaken by the State Govt. and BTC Govt. in Bodoland:-

As per the guideline of Central Govt., the State and BTC Govts implemented a number of schemes and programmes for the weaker sections of the community in rural areas. A number of Ministries as well as Officials both in the state and in the BTC areas have been entrusted with the responsibility of implementing these programmes. Developmental activities for women in the state as well as in BTC are being taken care of by the Department of Social Welfare, Women and Child

Development. There are a number of central schemes and programmes for the development and empowerment of women in Assam/Bodoland such as ICDS, DRDA, DWCRA, SGSY, PMGY, JRY, IMY, KSY, RMK, BSY, STEP, DPEP, NSAP, etc.

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) schemes was conceived in 1975 and continue till today with an integrated delivery package of services to improve the nutritional and health status of vulnerable groups including pre-school children, pregnant women and nursing mothers. It envisaged supplementary nutrition, pre-school education, immunization, health check up, referral services and health education. It also sought effective coverage of inter-sect-oral services through community based Anganwadi workers and helpers. Besides, ICDS is a meeting ground where women or mothers groups can come together with other frontline workers to promote awareness and joint action for child development and women's empowerment.

ICDS as a service delivery programme has certain features which constitute its areas of strength. The scheme is village-based and conducted by workers (Anganwadi workers and helpers) who are normally residents of the same locality. The workers maintain close contact with individual households of the village, thus taking away the impersonal approach generally found in Government run programmes. The programme enlists the active help and participation of voluntary organisations, social activists, academic institutions and professionals and there is a built-in scope for convergence of health, nutrition and childhood education services at Anganwadi level. The impact of the programme is evident from the remarkable improvements made in child survival and development indication. There is a tremendous decrease in the prevalence of malnutrition among pre-school children

and increase in immunisation coverage in ICDS areas, while school enrolment has improved. Besides, school drop out rate has also come down in ICDS areas.

ICDS today provides vital services to more than 2.88 crore children and 54 lakhs women in 4388 blocks and major urban slums. The govt. has approved a proposal to extend ICDS services in 390 projects with domestic support and 461 projects with support from the World Bank. In a phased manner, it is committed to universalise the scheme as early as possible during the Ninth Plan. In consonance with the life-cycle approach of development, a nation-wide unique intervention aimed at empowerment of adolescent girls was also tried in all community development blocks in the country during the specific plan. It is estimated that 12.8 lakhs adolescent girls from the deprived sections of the society will be benefited under the scheme renamed as Kishor Shakti Yojana. Besides, a new initiative in the form of Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY) has been introduced in order to achieve the objectives of sustainable human development at the village level in Assam as well as in Bodoland Territorial Council. PMGY envisages allocations for additional central assistance to the states and union territories for minimum services in order to focus on certain priority areas including nutrition. The allocation under the nutrition areas component of PMGY is to be made under the supplementary nutrition programme component of ICDS. It has been specifically outlined with the objective of eradicating malnutrition among children less than 3 years by increased nutritional coverage of supplementary feeding through ICDS.

Integrated Rural Child Development Programme (IRDP), which was a loan linked and subsidy oriented programme, was first initiated in 1978 in some selected districts of the country but extended all over the country by 1980. The basic objective of IRDP was to enable identified families in rural areas to cross the poverty line. By

1990 IRDP was implemented in all the districts of the state. As the coverage extended to remote and far off areas, the ratio of credit disbursement started declining. Since there were multiplicity of programmes associated with rural development programmes associated with rural poor, Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna (SGSY) was launched in 1995 by clubbing all the existing rural development programmes. SGSY is a major self employment program under implementation in the entire rural areas of the country. It aims at creating self employment opportunities for rural poor with emphasis on Self Help Groups (SHG) by providing them assistance through government subsidy and bank credit. The very purpose was to bring every assisted family above property line in three years.

Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) was started in 1982-83. Its main objective was to improve the living conditions of women and thereby of children through provision of opportunities for self employment and access to basic social services. The strategy adopted under this programme was to facilitate access of poor women to employment, skill up-gradation, training, credit and other support services so that these women as a group can take up income generating activities for supplementing their incomes. There were about 12 lakhs organised groups under DWCRA through out the country. Such activities included weaving, knitting, tailoring, piggery, poultry, fish vending, broom and rope making, brick making, candle making, etc. DWCRA was inaugurated in Assam in the year of 1985-86 especially in backward districts.

Mahila Swayam Sidha (MSS) which was previously known as Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY, 1995) was also introduced in Assam with the objectives of ensuring empowerment to ST women by encouraging thrift through small savings. It is proposed to recast the MSS into an Integrated Women's Empowerment Programme

(IWEF) and to expand throughout the districts of Assam. The long term objective of the IWEF is empowerment of women (socially and economically) by ensuring direct access to and control over resources through a sustained process of mobilisation and convergence of all ongoing sectoral programmes. Its immediate objectives are: a) to establish self reliance women's SHGs, b) to create confidence and awareness among members of SHGs regarding women's status, health, nutrition, education, sanitation, hygiene, economic upliftment and other social, economic and political issues, c) strengthening and institutionalising the saving habits of rural women and their control over their economic resources, d) improvement in access to micro credits, e) improvements of women in local level planning and f) convergence of services of department of women and child development and other related departments.

Balika Samridhi Yojana (BSY), under this programme Rs. 500/- as bonus given to each girl child born after 1998 August whose parents belong to below poverty line. More than 2000 beneficiaries are benefited from this scheme till March 2003 in BTC.

Udisha, it is a training scheme under ICDS funded by World Bank. It is a new scheme introduced in 1990-2000 by the Government of India for imparting training to all field functionaries under ICDS. Under *Udisha* programme Govt. of Assam established one training centre in all the districts of the state for proper implementation of the said scheme. More than 5000 Anganwadi workers have so far been trained and above 2500 were given refresher training. Besides, a training calendar was prepared for various centres so as to cover all untrained Anganwadi workers and helpers of all projects by the end of 2002-2003.⁸

National Social Assistance programme (NSAP) has got three components namely,

i) *National Old Age pension (NOAP)*: under this scheme as old age person above 65 years of age and living below the poverty line is provided @ Rs.100/- per month.

ii) *National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)*: under the scheme an amount of Rs. 10,000 is provided as one times grant to kin in case of death of a primary bread winner of the family.

iii) *National Maternity Benefit Schemes (NMBS)*: Under this scheme an amount of Rs. 500/- as one time grant is provided to pregnant mother for health care of the new born baby.

District Primary Educational Programme (DPEP) became very affective in the State and in BTC area since 2000 with the objectives to revitalise and expand primary education especially in remote and backward villages of the state as well as with special gender focus to universalise elementary education

Besides, Distance Education and National Open School have formulated and innovative project aimed at providing schooling to:

- a) Neo-literates who have acquired functional literary.
- b) Early school drop-outs with rudimentary literary skills.
- c) Drop-outs who have attended non-formal education programmes skills and whose literary skills are marginally better developed.

These strategies have shown a marked increase in the number of girls and women participating in technical, tertiary and vocational educational programmes started by the Government such as the VTI and ITI. Similar schemes extended to handicapped women in vocational rehabilitation centres have tried to promote and encourage women's education. Yet, these are found to be inadequate and show a need for a lot to be done in this area.

Self- Help Groups in empowering rural Bodo Women:

Today women are being gradually recognised as important, powerful and meaningful contributors to the society and in the life of men. Women empowerment is generally defined as a confidence building, insight into and understanding of developed mechanism. It also refers to increasing the political, social and economic strength of individuals and groups. The impact of new technologies and globalization on women's job is very much limited and unrewarding. The new market, tools and rules of the global era have failed to generate adequate job opportunities to the Indian women, especially (Bodo) who do not have adequate competence needed by the modern sector. In Bodoland, more that 80% women population reside in the rural area and are illiterate, ignorant and exposed in a male dominated society. Therefore, the status of Bodo women would rise only when the rural Bodo women are emancipated.

There is growing realization that rural Bodo women have been underestimated and discriminated against in all walks of life, despite their substantial contribution to the household economy and in turn the national economy. The UN commission on status of women observed that women who contribute half of the world's population, perform two thirds of the world's work, receive one tenth of its

income and own less than one hundredth of its property. The poor women of Bodo society are always deprived of their economic status, especially in rural area. Therefore, the degree of exploitation, instead of declining, is on the rise in rural area.

Despite the existence of huge banking network in the state, a large number of poor rural Bodo women do not have access to formal banking system. This is because formal banking sector demands high discipline in procedure and repayment and hence they fail to address the credit requirement of the poor. But, after the formation of Bodoland Territorial Council, present BTC government has initiated a number of schemes through various banking network existing in BTC area in order to improve the poor economic condition of the people as well as of the rural Bodo women in particular in Bodoland. Besides, the BTC government recognised Micro Finance through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) as one of the most promises and effective tools of poverty alleviation and empowering rural women and also as a potent tool to increase growth of economy through increasing the profit earning capacity of the borrower. This principal is based on the philosophy of Grameen Bank of Bangladesh. The experience of Grameen Bank believes that with the appropriate support, the poor women can be productively employed in generating activities including processing, manufacturing, transportation, storing, market, agricultural produce and rising livestock.¹⁰

Accessible and Affordable Health care System: - In healthcare sector also Assam Govt. and BTC Govt. have been initiating new schemes for the weaker section of rural people particularly for women folks. The advent of the National Rural Health Mission into the health care delivery system has brought about radical and visible developments in the entire health sector.

Outreach and Referral Services:

Mobile Medical Units:

- 27 Mobile Medical Units have been deployed to reach out the marginalised communities residing in rural and remote areas of the state.
- Introduction of additional Mobile Medical Units for 23 sub-divisions in the pipeline.
- 14, 81,083 patients already treated through this initiative.

Mritunjoy 108:-

- Deployment of 280 Mritunjoy Ambulances for referral transport including obstetric emergencies.
- Deployment of 5 boat ambulances scheduled in the pipeline.
- 1 million services have been rendered in 812 days of operation and 22,539 lives have been already saved.

Ensuring Referral services –Ambulance distribution:

- 350 ambulances procured under NRHM and placed in Govt. Hospitals.
- Additional 250 ambulances procured and deployed under Tea garden hospitals under PPP with NRHM, Assam.

Evening OPD – Availability of quality health services even during evening hours:

- A total of 28, 52,651 patients have been treated in evening hours under the evening OPD initiative.

To ensure availability of Medical & Paramedical personnel:

- Construction of 3 new BSc Nursing School and Hospital Building (Kokrajhar Dibrugarh and Silchar).
- Construction of 8 new GNM School and Hostel Building (Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Karimganj, Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao, Darrang, Morigaon Goalpara).
- Construction of 126 Rural Health Block Pooling Complex having 3 Doctors Quarters , 3 Nurse Quarters and 3 attendance quarters.

Initiatives under the Assam Bikash Yojana:

Majoni: Special assistance to the girl child (in the form of fixed deposit of Rs.500/-). So far total fixed deposit issued to beneficiaries- 1, 03, 764.

Mamoni: Nutritional support to pregnant women (Rs.1000/- for 3 antenatal checkups).

- Number of women who have received first instalment of Rs. 500/- 4, 92,747.
- Number of Women who received second instalment of Rs. 500/- 3, 60,113.

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Strategies to be taken by BTC for Women's Empowerment: some relevant Policy and Programme Information:

Till today, in Bodoland Territorial Council there is no residential Ashram school for tribal girl students although where more than 80% population are tribal in the Council. Only few school hostels for girls and boys for tribal students are running in BTC with very poor infrastructure facilities. Therefore more and more residential

schools are necessary particularly from upper primary level onwards in BTC. Ashram schools for tribal girls must be expanded throughout the Bodoland area. Education incentives in addition to free schooling such as supply of free text books, uniforms etc. to girls must be considered along with full security and modern infrastructure facilities for motivating parents to send their daughters to schools. The mid-day meal programme for school going children must be extended up to higher secondary level.

Better quality of schools, better standards of teaching, better motivation of teachers and better teacher-students ratio are very important for improving girls' enrolment and retention in schools. Schools also must be located close to habitations. Flexible school hours can also contribute to better enrolment and retention of girls. Adjusting school hours so that girls can combine schooling with other chores, at least in the short run, in one way of reducing opportunity costs of girl's time to parents. Special helps in science and maths needs to be arranged particularly in the upper primary levels if drop-out of girls is to be checked. Primary schools will have to be upgraded to include upper primary and secondary levels as a matter of strategy. The impact of peer group interaction on girls' education has been found to be a positive factor and a large extended school system can ensure this better. While setting up institutions like the commissioner for Women's Rights and Crime against Women Cells, gender sensitisation of police personnel including the rural police force should be given priority.

Education is a tool of Empowerment:

Education plays a vital role in the life of individuals as well as society as a whole. It assumes special significance in the context of a quasi-traditional or transitional society like that of India. The crux of interventions aimed at women's education as visualised in the NPE 1986, should be a process which can bring about

a change in women's perceptions about themselves and that of society in regard to women's traditional roles. It should create an environment where strategies emerge from priorities set by women themselves. Women in the village must mobilise in support of education and literacy for women and girls. There must be continuous efforts and awareness generation, conscientisation and active participation of women's groups in the educational, social and economic processes. The local educational project must become accountable to the community and parents, particularly mothers, through the village education committees.

There should be a forum for the convergence of services to support sibling care, health and economically productive activities, to address the needs of girls and women holistically and education must have a central role in this scheme of convergence. The Indira Mahila Yojana is a combination of awareness generation and conscientisation, mobilisation and organisation, convergence of services and accountability of local educational and other programmes to women. The Women's organisation, village educational society under the panchayat/village development council should be used as model points for setting up Indira Mahila Kendra at village level. These should ultimately become forums for initiating action; seeking solutions and pressurising village block and district structures to respond to the needs and demands of women in respects of their daily routine such as child-care, health, fuel, fodder, drinking water, education problems relating to domestic violence, alcoholism, status, self-image etc.

The problems of girls and women's access to and participation in education must be viewed in the totality of their situations and in the context of their multiple roles and their responsibility and the process of doing so must be stimulated from within by women themselves. Women must themselves understand the implications of their reality and must start viewing education as a pre-condition for fighting against oppression. It is this synergy of impact of the IMY, DPEP, ICDS etc., which holds the

key to creating an orchestrated demand articulation by women which is the best and most enduring guarantee of a responsive and accountable delivery system. In all plans, strategies and interventions gender must be mainstreamed. Therefore all plans and programmes in education must operate to reduce gender disparities. A progirl child slant must be consciously integrated in all strategies and programmes. Groups of women and girls with special needs such as SC/ST girls, disabled girls, specially gifted girls etc., must be identified for special care. There must be women participating in all decision making related to education.

In the context of female education in India, social thinkers in recent years have developed a large body of empirical evidence demonstrating how education can promote greater capabilities such as the freedom to participate in political and economic processes, use new technologies, projects one self against exploitation of all sorts (legal, economic, sexual), exercise personal mobility; attain higher social status and increase child and maternal well-being. Impacts of female education are enormous at the societal level – a more productive work-force, lower fertility, lower infant and child mortality and improvement in social image. UNICEF's *The State of World Children 2000* and *2001* state that children who grow up without basic education find it harder to sustain themselves and their families. It becomes quite difficult for them to make their way in society in a spirit of tolerance, understanding and quality. Education helps people learn how to achieve fundamental human rights such as health, nutrition, safe motherhood and employment while improving the quality of life.¹³

If education is to be a tool for empowerment, the content is of critical importance. This must be thorough revision of curriculum, text books and material to ensure removal of gender bias and stereo-types. Gender sensitisation of teachers on

a regular basis should be institutionalised through the NCERTs, SCERTs and state governments. Women's participation in all committees dealing with education at all levels starting with the village to the state should be increased.

UNESCO has rightly called upon all the nations to chalk out plans for providing free education to all children by 2015. Representatives of various nations have pledged that their respective Governments would work towards setting up welfare institutions for quality improvement among the youth and also to strive for removing gender bias at the primary and middle school level education. There is need to see how far the Indian Government has been able to translate its old constitutional obligations and the UN suggestion of universalising education into a reality so far.

Universalisation of Education and present Indian Scenario: India is one of the least literate countries in the world. There were all together 302 million illiterates in the country according to the 1981 census. This number rose to 328 million in the 1991 census, marking an addition of about 22 million in a decade. Out of 328 million illiterates in the country, 281 million live in rural areas, which are larger than the total population of the USA - the world's third most populous country.

From the above data one can easily understand the fate of the government's constitutional commitment concerning universal education under Article 45 of the Indian Constitution. Article 45 of the Indian Constitution under the Directive Principles of State Policy envisages, "The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years". Accordingly the constitutional provisions under Article 45 should have been fulfilled

by 1960. But unfortunately, this commitment has proved to be futile so far. The government of India made another solemn promise of 'Education for All' by 2000 at the *Educational for All Summit* in Delhi in December 1993. Government's current programmes and policies for achieving Universal Primary Education by 2000 and Universal Literacy by 2005 too could not succeed. The sad saga of our failures does not end here. The worst part of it is that the number of illiterates in India continued to increase steadily with the rapid rise in population and lack of commensurate increase in infrastructure to provide education to the in-coming members of society. However for the first time since independence, the census of India recorded declining trend in absolute number of illiterate from 328 million to 296 million during 1991-2001. The illiterate's population in India is still greater than the total population of any country in the world except for the People's Republic of China. About 50% of the total illiterate population in the world lives in India alone. This is indeed a very disgraceful distinction.

In term of persentance, mere 65% of the total population of India was recorded literate in the 2001 census. Further the level of literacy is much poorer in rural than urban areas; about 59% of the people in rural areas are illiterate as against 80% in urban areas according to 2001 census. India's population continues to be predominantly rural, as according to the 2001 census rural areas comprise 72% of the country's total population. It is true that the current level of education is far below the targets set by the government from time to time, the progress made during the post independence period in the field of education is partly satisfying nevertheless. It is also true that the pace with which literacy has increased has been slower as compared with some developing countries placed in a similar situation during the same period but the number of people recorded literate (562 million) in

2001 is greater than that of the total population of all individual countries in the world now, except for the People's Republic of China.¹⁴

Programmes for Training and Employment: Through the developmental planning in Assam there has been an effort to improve the skill endowments of women in all economic activities. In recent years, with the questioning of the status of women in society and the felt need to recognise them as a valuable human resource for the economy, the economic empowerment of women has become an important issue and concern. The Ten Five Year Plan, which coincides with economic policy transitions need to pay special attention to the distinctive characteristics of women's employment both to their economic status and employment with equal remuneration.

The most important employment oriented programme for women implemented by the *Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD)* is the *Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP)* launched during the VII Five Year Plan. This programme consists of a series of action plans intended to strengthen and improve women's work and employment in the sectors where women are predominantly engaged such as agriculture, small animal husbandry, dairying, fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts, Khadi and village industries etc.

The next important programme of training and employment for women implemented by the *Department of Women and Child Development* is the training-cum-employment-cum-production centres scheme assisted training programme. This programme extends financial assistance to both governmental and non-governmental organisations to train women in traditional trades' like electronics, manufacturing, watch assembly, computer programming, fashion technology etc.

The condensed courses of education and vocational training and the socio-economic programmes are the other employment oriented programmes in the department of women and child development which are being undertaken by the Central Social Welfare Board. The purpose of socio-economic programme is to fund training-cum-employment generating programmes which are similar to the STEP programmes.

A scheme to set up *Women's Development Programmes (WDP)* in all the States and Union Territories was formulated in 1986-87 with the objective of creating sustained income generating activities for women. The corporations were supposed to help women entrepreneurs identifying projects and in obtaining credit as well as to provide them with suitable marketing support. Besides, another important programme of the DWCD is the setting up of the *Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)*, an innovative institution for extending credit to poor women. Varied experiences in the financial sector have established the need for informal credit delivery systems which should be client friendly and have simple and minimal procedures, disburse credit quickly and have flexible repayment schedules.

The two programmes, *Mahila Sambriddhi Yojana (MSY, 1993)* and *Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY, 1995)* have been started recently. MSY seeks to bring about self-reliance among women by improving their saving and thrift habits while IMY is a strategy to converge the several beneficiary oriented schemes being implemented by different departments of the Government of India. The very objective is the economic empowerment of women by ensuring direct access to resources through mobilisation of savings and their actual participation in the development process.

Development of Rural areas and Employment Ministry who are responsible for a massive poverty alleviation programme in the country, implement wage

employment programme like the *Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY)* and *Prime Minister Rozgar Yojana (PMRY)* for wage employment and the *Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)*. Under the wage employment programme, 30% of the employment is reserved for women beneficiaries. Under IRDP, 40% of the beneficiaries have to be women. Training of Rural Youth for self-Employment which is a supporting component of the IRDP also provides for *Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)* and it was initiated in 1993 on a pilot basis as a sub-programme of IRDP with assistance of UNICEF. The objective of DWCRA is to focus on women members of families in rural areas below the poverty line by organising them into self-help groups and by providing them with economic activities and comprehensive services like health, sanitation and literacy. DWCRA aims to improve women's access to various services through the formation of self-help groups.

The Ministry of Urban Affairs and Employment is also implementing a country-wide employment oriented programme called *Nehru Rozgar Yojana (NRY)*. The Urban-micro Enterprises setup under NRY extends higher subsidies (Rs. 5000 for women while for others it is Rs. 4000) for women entrepreneurs. Similarly women also enjoy their share of benefits under the wage-employment services extended under NRY. A separate cell for entrepreneurship has been set up in the office of the Development Commissioner, Small Scale Industries to provide counselling to women entrepreneurs. There are several schemes e.g. the self employment for educated unemployed youth and others in which women are among the intended beneficiaries.

The Labour Ministry who have the major responsibility for vocational training have expanded and vocational training facilities for women. There are 154 Industrial Training Institutes/centre for women and 129 general ITI with women wings specially

catering to vocational training needs of women. The National Vocational Training Institute for Women at NOIDA and 6 regional vocational training institutes provide facilities for training in basic skills, advance skills in selected trades.

Employment exchanges in some states also operate self employment schemes. For instance, in West Bengal, a self employment scheme for the registered unemployed provides subsidy, subject to ceiling of 25% of the loans sanctioned by banks. In MP, assistance towards margin money is provided to entrepreneurs seeking loans from banks. In Assam, employment exchanges motivated as guide for the job seekers for self employment according to the availability of the schemes introduced by their respective government.

Women Reservation:

It is said that the civilization of a country is judged by the status that it accords to its women. An ideal society is one in which women are not subjected to inequality, injustice and ill-treatment. But inspite of having several legislations the condition of Indian women has not improved as desire level. Thousands of women in India are still dying everywhere while giving birth to a child. Girl children are being killed everyday before they come out this world. They are given marriage forcefully before attaining puberty. There are numerous instances of molestation and outraging the modesty of women every now and then.

There has been huge hue and cry over the last few years regarding Women's Reservation Bill seeking 33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures. But very unfortunately till today the bill has not been in practice. Now the greatest question is whether the Women's Reservation Bill will cure all the ills of women? What are the advantages we are going to achieve by providing 33% women

reservation? In reality the problems that Indians women are facing today have nothing to do with women reservation. By increasing women's representation through reservation only the women of rich and high class families will reserve the women seats in Parliament and State Legislatures. Therefore, instead of general women only a few privileged sections of women will be benefited from the women's reservation system. If we look at the developed countries there is no reservation for women representation. In the national Assemblies of many countries the women's representations is not more than 12%. In England the representation of women in the House of Common is just above 10%. In America women representations is not more then 7% - the country which speaks so much about women's empowerment has no women President in its history. On the contrary, the President of India is a woman and our history is full of women who have been the nation builders without reservation.¹⁵

Therefore, we may state that reservation is not everything for improving the status of women in Bodoland, because Bodoland Territorial Council is one of the most neglected areas in lower Assam, particularly socially, economically and educationally. So, besides reservation the most important is to improve the living condition of women, their educational level and standard of health. They need social protection, justice and equality. The most important of all is the need for change in our outdated attitude towards women.

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